

Another Letter On Trade Unions

By M. P. Black.

Editor of the Toiler:

I am sure that every reader of the Toiler is as delighted as I am to note that in your last issue you opened a discussion on Trade Unions with invitation to your readers to take part. Your answer to Comrade Cole was a splendid beginning for so timely a symposium. The subject reveals a large field for working class thought.

Since the Russian Revolution the popularity of the Soviets or workers Councils has become universal. We have seen in the last German and Hungarian Revolutions as well as in the recent Italian uprisings that these councils of workmen played a prominent role. In England the Shop Stewards movement and in Scotland the Scottish Workers Committees have been constantly developing. Due to the similarity of industrial conditions there is no doubt that this country too will, before long, witness the birth of this movement.

Trade Unions And Shop Committees

What relation then will the Trade unions bear to the shop committees? Will the shop committees displace the Unions? To answer these questions definitely would be mere prophecy. But by tracing the origin and development of both, and, by observing what conditions have obtained in countries where examples are more complete, some light can be thrown on their logical course.

So far, the trade Union movement has shown itself to be an organization for the protection of the daily interests of those portions of the working class, which, being related by craft, have banded themselves together. The mission of the trade union is to increase the pay, shorten the hours and to better the conditions of the working class.

Because of the failure of the Trade Union Movement to adapt itself to the changing conditions of industrial development, and its failure to discern the sharp contrasts and the irreconcilability of class interests, it has allowed itself to be dominated by a traitorous and pernicious labor bureaucracy. Such reactionary leadership has tended to nullify the true purpose of the movement.

While trade unionism flourishes mostly in times of comparative peace between capital and

labor, shop committees have their birth and thrive best in moments of greatest crisis. When Capitalist oppression and "sabotage" is at its height, when the working masses are faring worst, then it is that the workers' not along craft lines, but along industrial lines voluntarily organize into shop Committees.

Purpose Of The Shop Committees.

Is it then that the Shop Committees will be merely a new form of organization striving for the same things the trade Unions presume to offer? No. The mission of the shop committees is more than that.

The disintegration of Capitalism, resulting from the inherent contradictions within it, and hastened by the late war, has caused the capitalists to attempt, more strenuously than ever before, a new lease on life. Already in this country the owners of industry are adopting more and more the methods used by capitalism in Europe. They seem to find it more profitable to close down production to force acceptance of their terms on the working class, than to continue producing at a loss. They lay off their help and rehire them more cheaply. They fail to invest their capital at the time when prices are highest. This is Capitalist "sabotage".

All this, the trade unions, due to their reactionary leadership and their inefficient organization, are unable to meet. The workers must give resistance to these new and more vigorous class attacks. Since their struggles must be directed against the employers, they find themselves voluntarily organizing in their particular shops, regardless of political opinion, craft or nationality.

The owners are more economically fit to endure a long drawn out strike of the folded arm than the workers. The slaves are driven to desperation. There is only one thing to do — control the factories. But in doing this they meet the powerful opposition of the state. They are set face to face with armed authority. Then comes the political struggle. The shop committees are forced into open opposition to the Bourgeois State.

From this we see that the mission of the shop committees is workers' control of industry.